



*Office of the United States Attorney
District of Arizona*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, April 17, 2006

For Information Contact Public Affairs
SANDY RAYNOR
Telephone: (602) 514-7625
Cell: (602) 525-2681

TUBA CITY WOMAN INDICTED FOR EMBEZZLEMENT FROM TRIBAL WORK PROGRAM

PHOENIX, Ariz.- A federal grand jury in Phoenix, Ariz. returned a one-count indictment against Elyse Hongeva, 51, of Tuba City, Ariz. for the embezzlement of \$191,152.48 from the Navajo Nation Work Force Development Program (NWD). The indictment charging Theft Concerning Programs Receiving Federal Funds was returned on April 11, 2006. Hongeva has been summonsed to appear in federal court for an arraignment on Wednesday, April 26, 2006.

The indictment alleges that in September 2002 Hongeva opened a personal checking account under the name of her employer with herself as the only signer. Between September 2002 and July 2005, Hongeva then allegedly wrongfully deposited 61 reimbursement checks, totaling \$191,152.48, intended for the NWD. In this same time period 201 withdrawals, totaling \$187,883 were made and by Hongeva and used to pay personal and family expenses.

Hongeva was employed by the Navajo Nation from 1990 until October of 2005. Since 1993 she had worked as an accounting technician for the NWD. As an employee of the Department of Human Resources it was her job to track funds paid or refunded from educational institutions. Funding for the NWD comes from federal grants issued under the Workforce Investment Act through the U.S. Department of Labor.

A conviction for Theft Concerning Programs Receiving Federal Funds carries a maximum penalty of ten years in prison, a \$250,000 to \$500,000 fine or both. In determining an actual sentence, U.S. District Court Judge Stephen M. McNamee will consult the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges. Judge McNamee, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

An indictment is simply the method by which a person is charged with criminal activity and raises no inference of guilt. An individual is presumed innocent until competent evidence is presented to a jury that establishes guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

The investigation preceding the indictment was conducted by the FBI and U.S. Department of Labor. The prosecution is being handled by Peter Sexton, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

CASE NUMBER: CR-06-0380-PCT
RELEASE NUMBER: 2006-53(Hongeva)

###